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Christmas The World Over

Written specially for the Western Home Monthly

CHRISTMAS IN SWEDEN.

If you were in Sweden on Christmas Eve you would hear the church bells begin to ring at 5 o'clock, for everybody stops work then to permit of the festivities beginning everywhere in the Kingdom. Servants and master sup at the same table during the Christmas festivities.

After supper comes the proverbial Christmas tree, for Sweden has long been regarded as one of the foremost nations in the observance of this time-honoured custom. On Christmas morning almost everybody goes to church, a few remaining at home to mind the lights, for every home throughout the length and breadth of the land is illuminated. A considerable depth of snow is a certainty, and all go to church in sleighs. Two boys stand on the runners behind every sleigh and hold pine torches—a pleasing spectacle as the long line of sleighs glide over the frozen roads. These torches are stuck up in a circle around the church. A period of seven days is given up to visiting and hospitality.

IN NORWAY, DENMARK, AND RUSSIA.

In Norway and Denmark the Christmas customs very closely resemble the customs practised in Sweden. All of these northern people make much of Santa Claus and adhere to old customs. The customs vary somewhat in different parts. At seven o'clock on Christmas Eve the cathedral chimes commence to ring in most places in Norway. This is a signal for every person to go outside the house and listen. In the principal cities three Christmas hymns are played on wind instruments from the tower of the Cathedral, the people listen to the joyous notes and show great emotion. On Christmas Eve rice pudding of a special preparation is served in every true Norseman home. Every house has its Christmas tree, the whole family, including the servants, joining hands and dance and sing around it. The Christmas tree is decorated with candles and bright colored paper baskets, and it holds candies and cakes, in a majority of cases all home made. The pretty home made gifts shown on the Christmas tree are made directly from one member of the family to another. The wealthier classes send substantial gifts to the poor. In the country districts sheaves of grain and other foods are put outside for the birds to feed on and enjoy a feast also. On the barn floors of the farmers, bowls of warm porridge are set for poor Robin Goodfellow to comfort him because he has no soul. In Russia, Christmas Eve celebration begins with the setting of the sun. A brilliant "Star of Bethlehem" is borne aloft on a pole at the

head of a procession, and a visit is made to the houses of the noblemen and other dignitaries of the neighborhood. Carols are sung under the windows of the wealthy, and showers of coin are tossed to the singers. This is followed by a masquerade in which young and old appear in the guise of oxen, sheep, and other domestic animals, in memory of the Saviour's birthplace. The signal for supper is the appearance of the evening star in the heavens. Supper is served on

glass of fruits and mustard (called mustardo) is made by every Venetian rich and poor alike. Instead of the Christmas tree in Italy, you will find, especially in Florence, a basket made of straw to hold gifts. Gifts to children usually consist of a plaster toy representing the Nativity.

GERMANY.

The home of the Christmas tree is to be found in Germany. Practically every house in the Empire is converted into a shrine, and a heavily-laden evergreen receives the homage of the household. In many places when the clock strikes twelve on Christmas Eve the bells peal forth and the church, as well as every house, is quickly lighted up, not leaving even one dark window in the entire town. The whole family as a rule goes to

the answer is "Yes" he leaves beautiful presents, but if the answer is "No" he leaves a stick.

In Hanover, just when the candles on the Christmas tree are dying out there will be a mysterious rap on the door and a bundle will be thrown into the room. It contains a little present for every member of the family, and comic noses for some of them.

FRANCE.

In France the Christmas tree was unknown until quite recently, although now it forms part of the children's festivities in many places. The toylike representation of the Nativity called the creche, has been indispensable from the French home for centuries. The actual representation (called the pastoural), given by professionals or amateurs, is almost universal, and receives the patronage of the nation. The Scandinavian custom of feeding the birds is also widely observed. Wheat sheaves are hung along the eaves for that purpose. The Yule-log is likewise an important feature of the festivities. Nothing but a fruit-bearing tree will serve the purpose, and it must be cut by the head of the family, and the whole family must assist in taking it home. On Christmas Eve it is laid in the fireplace by the oldest and youngest of the family, typifying the old and the new year, and after it and the creche candles have been lighted the Great Supper (the Revillon) is served at midnight.

SPAIN.

In Spain the Christmas tree is conspicuously absent. In its shade is found a miniature representation of the birth of Christ made of clay or plaster. It always represents Jesus in the manger, and often Joseph and Mary and the animals in the stable. Sometimes the wise men from the East as well as angels are represented. It is all enshrouded in a kind of greenery. This is called a nacimiento, and a Spanish child will keep it from year to year and make additions to the collection.

In Spanish homes Christmas Eve is celebrated by a family party and a supper chiefly of sweetmeats and wines. In the country instead of hanging up their stockings the children hide their shoes and stockings in the bushes, and on Christmas morning find them filled with fruit and candies.

ENGLAND.

Before England became a Christian country, the yule-log was burnt in honor of a Pagan deity. But after the conversion of the people to Christianity the custom was adopted, and in many parts of England now the family, servants, and all gather about a great fire on Christmas Eve when the yule-log burns. Another custom which has come down to us from Pagan times is the hanging of the mistletoe. It was once a charm to ward off evil, and played a part in Christmas love-making, for the maiden who was caught under the mistletoe was kissed. It is now used in large quantities for Xmas decoration. The Christmas tree was practically unknown in England until it was popularized by the Prince Consort. It is now found in nearly every household.



THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

tables strewn with straw. Christmas trees are then brought forth, decorated, lighted, and presents exchanged. On Christmas Day the churches put on their most elaborate service, and after divine service the rest of the day is spent in feasting and merrymaking in the homes of the rich and poor.

CHRISTMAS IN ITALY.

Christmas in sunny Italy and throughout the Catholic countries of Southern Europe is very different from Christmas in Northern Europe. In Rome it is a quiet and solemn day, and the chief interest is in religious services. The celebration begins on December 25th, when the sacred Bambino (the Christ child) is brought out till January 6, when it is put away again. The Catholic churches are elegantly illuminated with innumerable candles and the magnificent and solemn service is everywhere largely attended. Family reunions follow divine service, but social festivities are unknown, although the usual mild weather prevailing permits of much outdoor merrymaking if such were the custom. A present of a box of peculiar candy made of honey and nuts (called mandorlato), and of a

early service, and in many parts of the country everyone carries a lighted candle. These candles placed on the backs of pews sometimes make the only light in church. It is a day of happiness and rejoicing throughout the Empire, and the presents, though universal, are generally simple. Gingerbread fashioned into men and angels and twisted into many grotesque shapes forms the staple gift. Sometimes it is artistically gilded.

IN OBERAMMERGAN.

In Oberammergan the Christmas festivities take on a purely religious aspect. The Christ-child is the guardian angel of the time, and it is He who brings the Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve He comes down from heaven holding it in His hands, preceded and followed by two angels bearing presents. He places the tree on the table, rings a bell, and flies away. To the kind and obedient children He brings a blessing. And St. Nicholas is the angel in disguise. He visits each and every house with a bag on his back and in ragged raiment. He gives a loud knock at the door, and asks "Are the children good?" If